



DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

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PUERTO RICAN EPISCOPALIANS CELEBRATE NEW STATUS

TRUJILLO ALTO, Puerto Rico -- A solemn yet festive celebration of the eucharist with multicolored **balloons** and trumpet fanfare in a sports gymnasium marked a historical occasion for the Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña here on Labor Day.

More than 2,000 Episcopalians from all parts of the island, and ecumenical delegates, met here to celebrate the new status of the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico as an extra-provincial diocese under the metropolitan authority of Province IX of the U.S. Episcopal Church.

The 1979 General Convention at Denver granted extra-provincial status to the Episcopal Diocese of Puerto Rico after 10 years of study and planning. This means that Puerto Rico is no longer a member of the General Convention, although a joint committee of both churches will foster and strengthen relationships at various levels.

The transfer of the metropolitan authority from the General Convention to the Ninth Province took place last March at a simple ceremony in Mexico City when Presiding Bishop John M. Allin and Bishop Lemuel B. Shirley of Panama, president of the province, signed the pertinent documents.

In his homily the Rt. Rev. Francisco Reus, Bishop of Puerto Rico, praised the vision of the Anglican Bishop of Antigua who planted churches in the island 108 years ago. He also thanked the Episcopal Church in the United States for its "consistent missionary zeal, love, and care" during the last 70 years.

Bishop Reus also praised the work done by the clergy and lay people who had prepared the Church for the present situation. "Without their support and selfless service, we would not be here today celebrating this great occasion," he said.

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In an apparent reference to criticism leveled against the new status, Bishop Reus said that the autonomy process has been a painful road but for the sake of "our own dignity and our commitment in the Body of Christ, the time has come for us to be responsible for the affairs and ministry of this Church in our own land."

He challenged the 10,000 Episcopalians in the island to work hard in order to make a reality the present plan for expansion and self-support.

Under its new status, the Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña will be able to develop local resources, incorporate new liturgical expressions in the liturgy, and implement canons that reflect local needs and cultural values.

In the covenant approved by the General Convention, the Episcopal Church in the United States will assist the Church in Puerto Rico with funds from the Venture in Mission campaign for capital development and other needs. It will also help to support the diocesan budget with a block grant that is expected to amount to \$218,000 this year.

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PICTURE CAPTION

80315 The Rt. Rev. Francisco Reus, Bishop of Puerto Rico, preached the homily at a service in Trujillo Alto on Sept. 1 when the diocese's new status as an extra-provincial diocese under the metropolitanical authority of Province IX was celebrated. The jurisdiction was formerly a diocese in the U.S. Episcopal Church.

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